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ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study investigated maternal locus of control and the mother's perceptions of relationships with her husband, her own mother, her child, her child's teacher, and her child's health care provider. To determine whether the mother's behavior is related to generalized expectancies, her locus of control was also correlated with interviewer ratings of her cooperativeness during the interview. Subjects were 321 low income women whose infants were normal at birth; 72 percent were black. They were interviewed during the third trimester of pregnancy, at 4 and 12 months postnatally, and during the child's kindergarten year. Rating scales of subjects' locus of control, perceptions of family members, and cooperativeness were completed during extensive interviews. Reliabilities of these rating scales were computed with Cronbach's alpha. Multiple regression analysis showed several statistically significant relationships between locus of control and other variables. It was concluded that experiences of autonomy and control in relationships with significant family members generalize as internal versus external locus of control. In subsequent relationships these experiences are externalized through perceptions of others and behavior with others. (CB)

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Interpersonal Relationships and Locus of Control: Expectancy and Reinforcement Effects

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Interpersonal Relationships and Locus of Control: Expectancy and Reinforcement Effects

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Social learning theory assumes that behavior is influenced both by the individual's expectancies and by reinforcements received from the environment (Rotter, 1954, 1982). Extensive research on internal versus external locus of control has demonstrated the fruitfulness of research on generalized expectancies (Lefcourt, 1976, 1982; Phares, 1976; Rotter, 1966). Research on children's and college students' perceptions of parent behavior has been interpreted as revealing antecedents of locus of control (Gilmor, 1978; Lefcourt, 1976; Phares, 1976;). Doherty's research on locus of control and marital adjustment suggests that locus of control influences marital adjustment (1981) and marital adjustment influences locus of control (1983). Thus locus of control may be interpreted as a consequence of continuing relationships with family members and as an antecedent of perceptions and behavior in other relationships.

An earlier analysis of data from this project showed that maternal locus of control during pregnancy and infancy is correlated with maternal behavior with the infant at 4 and 12 months (Schaefer, Edgerton, & Hunter, 1983). The present study investigates the mother's locus of control and her perceptions of her relationships with her husband, her own mother, her child, and her child's teacher and health care provider. To determine whether

her behavior, as well as her perceptions of others, is related to generalized expectancies, mothers' locus of control is also correlated with interviewers' ratings of mothers' behavior during the interview.

Method

Subjects

A longitudinal study of mothers and children from pregnancy through the kindergarten year began with a sample of 321 low-income women who received prenatal care in a public health clinic and whose infants were normal at birth. Of the initial sample, 72% were black, 44% were married, and 50% had 12 or more years of education. The final sample was not significantly different. All mothers were interviewed during the third trimester of pregnancy and approximately 83% were interviewed at 4 and 12 months postnatally. During the child's kindergarten year interviews were completed with 233 or 72% of the initial sample of 321 mothers.

Data collection

A six-item locus of control scale that was developed from items in Coleman (1966) and in Schopler, Langmeyer, Stokols, and Reisman (1973) was included in extensive interviews during pregnancy and at 4 and 12 months postnatally. The three items that were significantly intercorrelated were summed across the three interviews for a total infancy locus of control score. All of the eight locus of control items, including two from the infancy scales, that were included in the kindergarten interview contributed to the total kindergarten locus of control score.

Mother's perceptions of behavior of her husband and mother toward her were collected with the Autonomy and Relatedness Inventory (ARI) (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1982). Factor analyses of the ARI for mother and for husband have identified two factors best defined by (1) Autonomy versus Control, and (2) Relatedness versus Hostile Detachment. These factors are similar to factors identified in studies of parent behavior with children by Schaefer (1959) and Benjamin (1974). Mother's perceptions of her child's behavior toward her were collected with the Parent's Report of Child Behavior toward the Parent Inventory (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1977). Factor analyses of this instrument have revealed dimensions of (1) Love versus Hostile Detachment, and (2) Control Problems versus Obedience. Mothers' perceptions of relationships with the child's teacher and health care provider were assessed with the Parent-Teacher Interaction Inventory for Parents (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1980) and Parent-Health Care Provider Interaction Inventory (Potter, 1984). Cooperativeness and language skills of the mother were assessed by rating scales completed by the kindergarten year interviewer.

Data analyses

Reliabilities of the infancy and kindergarten locus of control data and of the scales that measured the mother's perceptions of her mother, husband, child, and child's teacher and health care provider were computed with Cronbach's alpha. Locus of control scores were correlated with mother's perceptions of others and with interviewer's ratings of the mother. Multiple regression analyses were used to determine the multiple correlations of

kindergarten and infancy locus of control with mother's relationships during kindergarten. Partial correlations of kindergarten locus of control with current relationships after controlling for infancy locus of control were examined.

Results

Cronbach alpha estimates of the internal consistency reliability of the infancy external locus of control scale were .54 during pregnancy, .64 at 4 months, .65 at 12 months and .79 for the sum of the pregnancy and infancy scores (PI-LC). Cronbach alpha for the kindergarten external locus of control (K-LC) scores was .84, and the correlation between the PI-LC and the K-LC scores was .47. Reliabilities of the brief scales of mothers' perceptions of the behavior of others toward her ranged from .59 to .78 with a mean of .69 for ARI scores for her mother, from .64 to .86 with a mean of .76 for ARI scores for husband, from .60 to .81 with a mean of .69 for Parent Report of Child Behavior toward the Parent Inventory, from .67 to .79 with a mean of .74 for Parent-Teacher Interaction Inventory and from .73 to .92 with a mean of .82 for Parent-Health Care Provider Interaction Inventory scores.

Correlations of PI-LC and K-LC scores with mother's perception of behavior of her husband and mother toward her are reported in Table 1. Perceptions during kindergarten of Hostile Control and Control by her mother were significantly correlated with both PI-LC and K-LC but by husband only with K-LC.

Table 2 shows correlations between mother's locus of control and her perception of her relationship with her child. K-LC was significantly correlated with her report of child's Detachment and

to a lesser extent with Control Problems, with significant correlations with Detachment ($r=.50$, $p < .001$) for boys, and with both Resisting Control ($r=.33$, $p < .001$) and Detachment ($r=.31$, $p < .001$) for girls.

As shown in Table 3, correlations of mother's K-LC with perceptions of child's teacher were .31 ($p < .001$) with reports that teacher is demanding of mother and child and .41 ($p < .001$) that mother is uncomfortable with teacher. Similar correlations were found between mother's K-LC and her perception of the child's health care provider as lacking sensitivity ($r=.38$, $p < .001$) and the mother dreading visits with provider ($r=.35$, $p < .001$). Table 4 shows that the interviewer's report of mother's cooperativeness during the kindergarten interview correlated -.35 ($p < .001$) and -.34 ($p < .001$) with PI-LC and with K-LC, respectively.

Multiple regression analysis of the mother's perceptions of her own mother, child, and child's teacher and the interviewer's perceptions of the mother with K-LC yielded an r^2 of .36 ($N=121$; $p < .0001$). Since a multiple regression that included both mothers and husbands would have yielded only a small subsample, a second multiple regression was computed of mother's perceptions of husband, child, child's teacher, and interviewer perceptions of the mother with K-LC, yielding an r^2 of .51 ($N=80$, $p < .0001$).

Mother's perception of her own mother, husband, child, and child's teacher and also interviewer's perception of the mother all contributed significantly to these multiple correlations, with the greatest relationships for scales of perceptions of mother's and

husband's Control, child's Detachment, mother's Discomfort with Teacher, and interviewer ratings of mother's Uncooperativeness. Unreported partial correlations of K-LC with mother's relationship data during kindergarten after controlling for PI-LC showed significant correlations with perceptions of husbands but lower correlations with other relationships.

Discussion

The study presents correlations of a woman's locus of control with her perceptions of current behavior toward her of her mother and husband. Perceptions of her own mother's Control and Hostile Control are significantly correlated with her external locus of control both during her child's infancy and kindergarten year. However, her perceptions of husband's Control and Hostile Control is only significantly correlated with kindergarten locus of control. These findings complement Doherty's (1983) findings that women during the period of transition from marriage through divorce show increases in externality followed by a return to internality in subsequent years. Thus current relationships with husband may result in short-term changes in locus of control while early and continuing relationships with parents may have enduring correlations with locus of control.

Mother's locus of control was related to observations of mother-child interaction during infancy in an earlier study (Schaefer, Hunter, & Edgerton, 1983). In the present study mother's external locus of control was significantly correlated with her perception of relationship problems with her child.

Possible interpretations of this finding are: 1) that the external mother did not develop a positive relationship with the child during infancy, 2) that the child is responding to the mother's current behavior, or 3) that the mother's perceptions are influenced by her expectancies.

The interviewer's rating of the mother as uncooperative during the interview suggests that the mother's external locus of control may influence her behavior with a stranger who may be viewed as directing the mother's behavior. Correlations of the mother's locus of control with her reports of experiences with her child's teacher and health care provider also suggest that the mother perceives professionals as threatening authority figures. If the mother has previously experienced asymmetric, authoritarian relationships with her parents and husband that have resulted in expectancies of external locus of control, these expectancies may influence her behavior with and perceptions of strangers and/or professionals. Expectancies of control by others and negative perceptions of others may result in defensive, uncooperative behavior with both interviewer and professionals. Bryant's (1974) finding that children with external locus of control report more difficulties in their relationships with teachers suggests that children's as well as adult's perceptions of authority figures are influenced by locus of control.

These data strongly suggest that experiences of Autonomy and of Control in relationships with significant family members that are generalized as internal versus external locus of control are subsequently externalized through perceptions of others. Thus

Mead's (1934) hypothesis that perceptions of the self are influenced by the internalized evaluations of others might be complemented by a hypothesis that perceptions of self are externalized as perceptions of others. Experiences with significant others are apparently internalized and generalized as expectancies for self and others, and externalized in perceptions of others and behavior with others in subsequent relationships.

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Appendix 1

Locus of Control During Pregnancy (P), Infancy (I), and Kindergarten (K)

Locus of Control Items	Interview
Being responsible for a child is more than I might be able to manage.	P, I
When there are decisions to be made, what I say makes little difference.	P, I, K
I have little chance to get ahead in life unless I have a lot of luck.	P, I, K
Some of the best things that have happened in my life were due to luck.	K
I am happiest when I don't have to make decisions.	K
Things just happen to me and there's not much I can do about it.	K
Good luck is more important than hard work for success.	K
People like me don't have much of a chance to be successful in life.	K
Everytime I try to get ahead, something or somebody stops me.	K

Appendix 2

Sample Scales and Items in Relationship Inventories

Autonomy and Relatedness Inventory (Husband and Mother

Autonomy (3 items. Reliability = .77 for husbands, .63 for mothers)

Let me make up my own mind.
Think it's okay if I disagree with him/her.

Control (4 items. Reliability = .71 for husbands, .78 for mothers)

Expects me to do everything his/her way.
Won't take no for an answer when he/she wants something.

Detachment/Rejection (4 items. Reliability = .64 for husbands, .58 for mothers

Makes fun of me.
Doesn't think about me very much.

Parent Report of Child Behavior to the Parent

Resisting Control (5 items. Reliability = .68)

Seldom obeys me unless I keep after him/her.
Keeps after me for things even after I say no.

Detachment (5 items. Reliability = .76

Doesn't talk to me much.
Resists my attempts to be warm and friendly.

Parent-Teacher Interaction Inventory for Parents

Uncomfortable with Teacher (3 items. Reliability = .67

I dread having a conference with the teacher.
I feel ill-at-ease when I go to the school for any reason.

Teacher too Demanding of Mother and Child (4 items. Reliability = .72

The teacher demands too much of my child.
The teacher expects too much of me as a parent.

Parent-Health Care Provider Interaction Inventory

Lacks Sensitivity (4 items. Reliability = .78)

The doctors and nurses should spend more time with my child.
They are concerned about sickness but not about peoples feelings.

Dreads Visits (4 items. Reliability = .73)

They seem to blame me for my child's problems.
I dread taking my child to the clinic/doctor/nurse.

Interviewer's Ratings of Mother

Cooperation (4 items. Reliability = .81)

How cooperative was the respondent?
In general, how communicative was the mother?

Language Skills (9 items. Reliability = .94)

Is quick to grasp the meaning of a question.
Is able to communicate ideas well.